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ABSTRACT

A booklet on traditional fishing practices of the Karuk Indians of northwestern California is presented in the formal, literary English speech of Norman Goodwin, a Karuk medicine man involved in preserving ancient tribal traditions. Empirical information and personal narratives are combined in descriptions of different kinds of nets, social rules governing fishing, type of skills and attitudes involved, rituals, and personal experiences in learning how to fish. Karuk words are included in the English text; 60 common expressions and terms concerning fishing are provided in English, Karuk, and Karuk Unifon. Recall of information is tested with a set of 12 questions and responses in English. (LFL)

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KARUK FISHING

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Bilingual Education Program
Center for Community Development

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As told to Ruth Bennett by Norman Goodwin, in August of 1982.

INTRODUCTION

The text presented here is the actual speech of a noted Karuk fisherman. Norman Goodwin is also a fluent bilingual, in Karuk and English, a medicine man for the Karuk people, and one of the primary Karuks involved in preserving ancient traditions and carrying on these practices up to the present day.

In this booklet on fishing, Mr. Goodwin presents a description of the different kinds of nets, the social rules governing fishing, the type of skill involved, and his personal experiences learning how to fish. The text thus combines the empirical and the personal. It is representative of the formal, literary style of the speaker.

Finally, this booklet was prepared by Ruth Bennett, Director of the Bilingual Education Program at the Humboldt State University. The comprehension questions in Karuk were written by Professor William Bright, UCLA.

Ruth Bennett
Bilingual Education Program
October 4, 1982

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WHAT TRADITIONAL KARUK FISHING IS LIKE

When salmon came up in the spring, you use the set net. The name for it is TO-K*-KE. The net's usually built with a fishing platform, you fish off the platform. It's put on an A-frame square, instead of having a hoop. It's square, down the river. It's usually built in an eddy.

That's one form of salmon fishing. Also you use the same net to catch eels. And that net is used also in the fall of the year when you have the high water. It's a small mesh net, a dip net over at the falls. You catch trout, steelhead, some salmon too if they're really early. It's only done when the water's high.

Then we speared a lot, too. Spearing salmon is one of the traditional ways of fishing. They used to make points, the poles, for spears. It hasn't been done for awhile, the last time I did it was 13 years ago in the creek. I've seen my dad, my uncles, throw a spear 15-20 feet, and hit a salmon with it.

And then some of the earlier ways of fishing, before my time, was the fish dams. They were made over around Somes on the Salmon River at Oak Bottoms. At the same time they had the spears and set nets, they had the Fish Dams. They built it at just before a big pool. They used hand nets to dip them out, or the spears. They'd have boats out there, or they'd build platforms and then there was a place where you opened the dam to let the fish go by, so you never kept is completely closed. The dam went all the way across the rivers.

On the river, there were different fishing spots owned by different families. At the falls, it was set up where every third day, the owner would fish. All the fishing spots were named.

Like on one side, there were two separate places on one day. There were 2 parties that fished on that spot on one day. On the opposite side, there was only one. That's the way it was set up. Every third day, your fish day came around. Everyone had enough

salmon in those days. Of course if your family, or you personally owned a fish day, you had first choice.

When I said every third day, that didn't mean that there was two days where nobody didn't fish. We fished every day of the week there, but every third day, the individual that owned the fish day would get his turn. But they never did take anymore than they could use. I've been down there and fished and we got what we needed, all we could care for, by 11:00 in the morning. We used to sit there and watch that salmon go through there by the hundreds, no need to take them. You took what you needed, never anymore. And the rest was given to the other people that were there. There were always people that were waiting for salmon. And they respected you, when you took your salmon. You owned a fish day and took first choice. There was never a want for salmon. Every Indian that came to the falls was given salmon. Salmon was plentiful, and there was no greed in those days. And the same way with the set nets for fisheries. We call them fishing platforms.

It was owned, usually by families, up on the river. There was a few at Orleans that did a lot of fishing that way with the set nets. We never used gill nets or any part. Karuks never did. Of course now it's different.

The gill net traps them and kills them. They're caught in their gills, it cuts their oxygen off. Then they die. Set net's different. You have to wait for them. You have a feeler that goes through the net. You need about three of them that you slip on to your fingers in different spots, in three places, one in the middle, and you sit there when you feel that salmon in there, you raise the net as fast as fast as you possibly can. We believe that we give a salmon a fair chance to get away. He isn't dead when we get him. He's still alive when he gets out. Where a gill net is different. He's dead. So we give the salmon a fair chance.

There were prayers for when we took the salmon out of the river, for when we arrived at the fishing

I can say this being Indian is just one big ceremony. It's a prayer. Everything you do, you pray to the great spirit for protection, for help.

That's what the ceremony (PI-KI-O-WIS) is all about, to try to enhance the fish so they'll never stop. If we don't stop, I think the salmon will be here.

The way to go would be the hatcheries. The fish have to get up there to dam, the iron gate. I see the salmon, I've seen a great decline my lifetime; however, I don't think that it will be totally lost, because of the fact that there's a lot being done, in the lower Klamath and out in the ocean, where there's a lot of gill net and commercial fishing, I do believe they'll realize what's happening to the fish. If they don't come to some agreement for regulation of the taking of the salmon, it will be gone.

LEARNING TO FISH

I did catch my first salmon when I was six years old, in the back stream there. There was salmon all over, they were coming up. Some of them had even their backs sticking out of the water, there were so many of them all over. I saw this one, and I asked my dad,"Can I catch him?" He said, "Sure." We came back down to go fishing. We fished. I took and caught the salmon. But I didn't actually start fishing until I was 16 or 17 years old. I tried it several times prior to that when I was in my early years, 14 or 15. But I'd say I was 14 or 15 when I first started. I found out I wasn't as great a fisherman as I thought I was because it takes a lot of skill, and it's hard work also.

You had caps so it would be braced, you had one pole, you brought it in, you fished a small place where it was braced. Up against the rock, you trapped the fish. And then they try to escape, so when you

feel them hit the bottom of the net or the side of the net, you brought it up as fast as you could. You may have three, four, or five. I've gotten as high as seventeen. That's too many to pull out by yourself. I've pulled out eight, up to twelve by myself, though. Large salmon. They used to weigh twenty pounds. Of course you have a helper there that helps you. He can grab the net.

You can't see the fish. Once in a while maybe you'll see one of them rise, one or two of them rise. If there's a lot of fish you'll see them because those holes are not that big. When they all come up on top, you see lots. We wait, until the first break of day. You watch them, you put your net on, and you start fishing. So you put that net down the first time. You can probably only dip twice. You'll score then. They'll smell that net and they'll go, they'll go down. You go to the next hole and do the same thing. The third one, we used to have three or four fishing places. When we finish, all go down, they never go up, they go down,

or they go across the river. Most of them go back to the big hole at the bottom of the falls. We wait ten to fifteen minutes, depending upon the size of the run. Good run, ten minutes, they go back in there, if the run's not that great, a half hour. Barely a few, an hour. Then fish again. They'll do the same thing. Some do get by, but once they start running, you see the first one come in the holes, you'll have to wait. Until you can see that there's fish, you set up there and you can watch you can just about tell when to dip it and when not to dip. A lot of them go on by. I can say for ten minutes to an hour depending upon the size of the runs.

You have to be trained to see salmon. A lot of people could go down there and sit there all day long. Never see a salmon. I could go down there and even if they were running real slow, I could see one or two move. Going flashing fast, I can see the tip of its tail.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS IN KARUK

1. a) salmon, fish (in general)

áama
ÓÓ-MO

b) He's catching it. (="killing it")

uykárati.
UY-KÓ-RO-TI

c) He's catching fish.

áama uykárati.
ÓÓ-MO UY-KÓ-RO-TI

d) man

ávansa
Ó-VON-CO

e) The man is catching fish.

ávansa áama uykárati.
Ó-VON-CO ÓÓ-MO UY-KÓ-RO-TI

2. a) dip-net

takíkar
TÓ-KI-KOR

b) with a dip-net

takíkar mûuk
TÓ-KI-KOR MÛUK

c) He's catching fish with a dipnet.

takíkar mûuk áama uykarati.
TÓ-KI-KOR MÛUK ÓO-MO UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

3. a) set-net

ikríhar
IK-RÍ-HOR

b) He's catching fish with a set-net.

ikríhar mûuk áama uykárati.
IK-RÍ-HOR MÛUK ÓO-MO UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

4. a) hook and line

išxâar
IS-XÔOR

b) He's catching fish with a hook and line.

išxâar mûuk áama uykárati.
IS-XÔOR MÛUK ÓO-MO UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

5. a) fish spear

itkáanvar
IT-KÓON-VOR

b) He's catching fish with a fish spear.

itkáanvar mûuk áama uykárati.
IT-KÓON-VOR MÛUK ÓO-MO UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

6. a) He's dip-netting. (same as 2.c.)

utákikti
U-TÓ-KIK-TI.

b) The man is dip-netting.

pa-á́vansa utá́kikti.
PO-Ó-VON-CO Ʊ-TÓ-KIK-TI.

7. a) He's fishing with a set-net. (same as 3.b.)

ú́kriihti.
Ʊ́K-RIIH-TI.

b) The man is fishing with a set-net.

pa-á́vansa ú́kriihti.
PO-Ó-VON-CO Ʊ́K-RIIH-TI.

8. a) He's fishing with a hook and line.(same as 4.b.)

ú́sxaayti

b) The man is fishing with a hook and line.

pa-á́vansa ú́sxaayti.
PO-Ó-VON-CO Ʊ́C-XOOY-TI.

9. a) He's spearing fish. (same as 5.b.)

ú́tkaanvuti.
Ʊ́T-KOON-VƱ-TI.

b) The man is spearing fish.

pa-á́vansa ú́tkaanvuti.
PO-Ó-VON-CO Ʊ́T-KOON-VƱ-TI.

10. a) king-salmon

ísyą̂at
IS-YÔOT

b) He's catching king-salmon.

išyầat uykárati.
IS-YOOT UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

11. a) steelhead

sáap
CÓOP

b) He's catching steelhead.

sáap uykárati.
CÓOP UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

12. a) trout

askuup
OC-KUUP

b) He's catching trout.

askúup uykárati.
OC-KÚUP UY-KÓ-RO-TI.

13. a) eel

akraah
OK-ROOH

b) He's hooking them.

utáčunti
U-TÓ-ƆUN-TI.

c) He's hooking eels.

akráah utáčunti.
OK-RÓOH U-TÓ-ƆUN-TI.

14. a) fishing platform

imvir
IM-VIR

b) on a fishing platform

imvírak
IM-VÍ-ROK

c) He's fishing (with a set-net) on a fishing platform.

imvírak úkriihti.
IM-VÍ-ROK Ú-KRIIH-TI.

15. a) He's making it, he's fixing it.

ukyâati.
UK-YÂA-TI.

b) pole

tâaskar
TÂAC-KOR

c) He's making the fishing platform with poles.

tâaskar mûuk imvír ukyâati.
TÂAC-KOR MÛUK IM-VÍR UK-YÂA-TI..

16. a) net

urípi
U-RÍ-PI

b) in a net

urípihak
U-RÍ-PI-HOK

c) He's catching fish in a net.

urípihak áama uykárati.
O-RÍ-PI-HOK ÓO-MO OY-KÓ-RO-TI.

17. a) wood (same as stick)

áhup
Ó-HOP

b) with a stick

áhup mûuk
Ó-HOP MÔOK

c) He's killing fish with a stick.

áhup mûuk áama uykárati.
Ó-HOP MÔOK ÓO-MO OY-KÓ-RO-TI.

QUESTIONS

18. a) what

fâat
FÔOT

b) that

páykuuk
PÓY-KOOK

c) What's that?

fâat páykuuk?
FÔOT PÓY-KOOK?

19. a) That's a salmon. (or: steelhead, trout, etc.)

páykuuk áama.
PÓY-KUUK ÓÓ-MO.

b) Is that a salmon?

páykuuk-húm áama?
PÓY-KUUK-HÚM ÓÓ-MO?

c. Yes, that's a salmon.

hãã, páykuuk áama.
HÓÓ, PÓY-KUUK ÓÓ-MO.

d. no

pûu-hara
PÙU-HO-RO

e) It's not a salmon.

pu-áama-hara.
PU-ÓÓ-MO-HO-RO.

f) No, it's not a salmon, that's a steelhead.

pûuhara, pu-áama-hara, páykuuk sáap.
PÙU-HO-RO, PU-ÓÓ-MO-HO-RO, PÓY-KUUK CÓÓP.

20. a) What?

fâat?
FÂOT?

b) He's doing it.

ukyâati
UK-YÂO-TI.

c) What is the man doing?

á́vansa fâ̂at ukyâ̂atị?
Ó-VON-CO FÔ̂OT ʊK-YÔ̂O-TI?

d) He's catching fish.(same as 1.c.)

á́ama uykáŕati (or: He's catching
Ó́O-MO ʊY-KÓ-RO-TI. steelhead, etc.; he's
dip-netting, etc.)

21. a) What kind?

fâ̂at kô̂ok
FÔ̂OT KÔ̂K

b) What kind of fish?

fâ̂at kô̂ok pa-á́ama?
FÔ̂OT KÔ̂K PO-Ó́O-MO?

c) What kind of fish is he catching?

fâ̂at kô̂ok pa-á́ama uykáŕati?
FÔ̂OT KÔ̂OK PO-Ó́OMO ʊY-KÓ-RO-TI?

d) He's catching king salmon.(or steelhead, etc.)

iš̆yâ̂at uykáŕati.
IS-YÔ̂OT ʊY-KÓ-RO-TI.

22. a) How?

hû̂ut?
HʊʊT?

b) How does he make the fishing platform?

imvir hû̂ut ukyâ̂ati?
IM-VIR HʊʊT ʊK-YÔ̂O-TI?

c) He makes it with poles.

tâaskar mûuk ukyâati.
TÓOC-KOR MÓOK O-KÝÔO-TI.

23. a) How does he kill the fish?

áama hûut uykárati?
ÓO-MO HÛOT OY-KÓ-RO-TI?

b) He kills them with a stick.

áhup mûuk uykarati.
Ó-HOP MÓOK OY-KÓ-RO-TI.

24. a) Where?

hôoy?
HÔY?

b) Where does he kill the fish?

áama hôoy uykárati?
ÓO-MO HÔY OY-KÓ-RO-TI?

c) He kills them in the net.

urípihak uykárati.
O-RÍ-PI-HOK OY-KÓ-RO-TI.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

1. What net do we use?

   In the Spring, we use the set net.

2. How is this net built?

   It's put on an A-frame.

3. Where do you fish?

   You fish off a platform.

4. What was an early way of fishing?

   The fish dams were.

5. How were the fishing spots set up?

   You fished every third day.

6. Who had salmon in the early days?

   Every Indian who came to the falls.

7. What gave us help in getting salmon?

   We prayed to the great spirit.

8. When do we fish?

   In the morning.

9. When do boys start to fish?

   When boys are sixteen or seventeen years old.

10. How do you catch salmon?

    You trap the fish.

11. How many fish can you trap?

    You can trap as many as seventeen at one time.

12. Where do you put the net?

    Where you can see the salmon.

    You can see the tip of its tail.

    The salmon goes by, flashing fast.

DEFINE

Set net	Fish Dam
Spear	Dip Net